

ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

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School Districts Help Feed Kids Over Summer Break (nwaonline.com)

Some children in Benton and Washington counties will be able to walk to school for a free meal this summer, according to school district officials.

The Bentonville, Fayetteville, Rogers and Springdale districts will operate a summer meal program called Seamless Summer through the Arkansas Department of Education Child Nutrition Services. The program is funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, said Elena Gaona, spokeswoman for the department's Food and Nutrition Services.

The state Department of Education distributes money to schools, churches and nonprofit groups that qualify, Gaona said. The money can be used for food and to pay the wages of food service employees who prepare the meals, said Patricia Winders, assistant director of program administration with Child Nutrition Services.

"The money goes where it's intended to go and that's feeding children," said Margie Bowers, food services director for the Rogers School District.

Child Nutrition Services employees were concerned for a time that funding would be impacted by federal budget cuts, also called sequestration, Winders said. However, child nutrition money was not cut, she said.

The Seamless Summer program gives parents a way to feed their children during the summer, Bowers said. Many of the same parents depend on the free and reduced-price meal plan during the school year.

A school has to have at least 50 percent of its student population on a free and reduced-price meal plan to qualify for the program, said Carol Godfrey, director of food services for the Springdale School District. The program allows any child 18 or younger to receive free meals during the summer, according to the Department of Education website. They do not have to be a part of the free or reduced price meal program during the school year.

Administrators in the districts decide which schools will host the program based on the number of students qualifying for the free and reduced-price meal plan and the distance children must walk to get to the schools.

The Springdale School District has 67 percent of its students on a free and reduced-price meal plan, Godfrey said. The program will provide lunches for children at Parson Hills and George elementary schools over the summer, she said.

The schools were chosen because they are in areas that are easy for kids to walk to, Godfrey said. Sonora Elementary School wouldn't work because it's on a busy street that's not safe for children, she said.

The Bentonville School District has 30 percent of their students on a free and reduced-price meal plan, said Mary Denny, nutrition service manager. Mary Mae Elementary School will be the only school in Bentonville to host the program this year because the area was the only one with more than 50 percent of the students on a free and reduced-price meal plan, she said.

Mary Mae Elementary is a good location for the program because children in nearby apartment buildings can easily walk to the school, Denny said. She's not sure if Mary Mae Elementary will have the program next year because of district rezoning after a new elementary school and middle school were built last year, she said. The rezoning might decrease the percentage of children in the area on a free and reduced price meal plan, she said.

The Rogers Activity Center will also participate in the program, serving both breakfast and lunch, said Marleen Heyns, child care program director for the center. The center is located near Northside Elementary School which has a high percentage of children on the free and reduced price lunch plan, she said.

"When school is out, they have nothing," she said.

The program is a way for the children to get two healthy meals a day at no cost, she said.

The Rogers School District has 61 percent of their students on the free and reduced-price lunch plan,

Bowers said. The program will operate at Rogers High School, Old Wire Elementary, Joe Mathias Elementary and Bonnie Grimes Elementary, she said.

The district is trying a new method of getting food to children who might not walk to a school for a meal. A truck will deliver food to Edgewood Apartments on West Beechwood Drive and Meadow Park Apartments on North 16th Street, Bowers said.

"It just makes sense to take it to them," she said.

The Fayetteville School District has 40 percent of its students on a free and reduced-price meal plan, said Ginny Wiseman, associate superintendent for administrative services. Owl Creek School will be the only school in Fayetteville to offer the program this year, she said.

There are five other schools in the district that can qualify for the program, but Owl Creek is easily accessible to students during the summer, Wiseman said. The school is across the street from the local Boys & Girls Club and is close to residential areas where children can walk to the school, she said.

The program reaches 15 percent of the children in the U.S. who are on a free and reduced-price meal plan, Gaona said. It's difficult to get a student to go to school if there isn't another activity happening, she said, explaining low participation numbers.

Summer school programs help to increase participation in the lunch program because students are already at the school, Godfrey said. Attendance tends to decrease after summer school ends, she said.

District to demolish vacant Scott school (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

The vacant Scott Junior High School building on Alexander Road in the Scott community will be demolished beginning Monday, a process that will take up to three weeks to complete.

According to Superintendent Jerry Guess of the Pulaski County Special School District, which owns the old school, the building is both an eyesore and a hazard. The school was constructed in 1929 and last used as a regular school in 1988.

"That secondary school is in terrific disrepair and in danger of collapsing. Before that happens, we are going to take it down," Guess said. "It's way beyond preservation. The exterior walls are bulging out in places. The weight of the roof has finally forced the walls to bow out. That's why we decided we had to do something."

The elementary school next door, built in 1963 and currently serving 160 pupils in grades kindergarten through five, will continue to be an operating district school.

The vacant building contains asbestos, but the condition of the building is such that removal of the asbestos by conventional methods is not safe, Guess said.

"If you go in and start removing tiles or something, you could end up with a building on top of you," he said.

Asbestos was once widely used in insulation and other building materials, including tiles. It is now known that airborne asbestos fibers are a contributor to lung disease.

Derek Scott, the district's chief operations officer, said that the demolition company will surround the building with sprinkler cannons and use them to soak the building with water before knocking it down. The resulting rubble will be hauled to a landfill that can take asbestos material. New dirt and grass will be put on the site.

Scott said the cost of removal will be about \$240,000.

Martin Gipson recently moved to his native Scott after spending 45 years in North Little Rock, including 24 years on the City Council. Gipson said he "first stumbled into Scott school" - the building targeted for removal - "as a bright-eyed first-grader in 1945."

Grades one through six were housed on one side of the building, grades seven through 12 were on the other side and central Arkansas' first regulation-size school gymnasium was in the middle, Gipson said. He attended school there for 11 years before attending Little Rock Central High his senior year.

On the outside, the white, single-story, mostly flat roofed school featured a row of protruding beams along the roof line, giving it a Spanish mission flair.

Gipson recalled the school as a "wonderful" building with hardwood floors, thick walls, and rooms heated with radiators and cooled with open windows.

Class pictures once lined the hallways, but he believes those were lost or ruined as a result of the building's various transitions and lack of use. About a decade ago, Gipson was able to get into the building to rescue the school's collection of trophies.

A 1961 Pulaski County Special School District report said the school had 14 classrooms at that time and had exceeded its 420-student capacity with 446 students.

The building housed elementary pupils after a new building was built next door in 1963 for the secondary students. But the elementary pupils were moved fairly soon into the newer building, and the older building saw only limited use.

In 1982, the school district took steps to upgrade the long-closed building. New wiring, plumbing, lights, heating and air conditioning were installed, according to news accounts, so the school could be reopened for junior high students who were having to travel sometimes in excess of 20 miles to reach the Sylvan Hills Junior High campus.

But the junior high school was closed for good in 1988 as part of the district's wide-ranging plan to cut millions of dollars in expenses.

Gipson said the school was rich in history and tradition.

"I have a lot of fine memories," Gipson said. "We had a great basketball team. We had a lot of great dances at school and great Halloween carnivals."

Every year in August, former students of the Scott school hold an all-classes reunion, which includes former students now in their 90s who graduated in the 1930s. That reunion will be held again later this summer at a site other than the school.

Gipson said the lack of schools in a part of the county that is seeing an increase in residential development is a concern.

"Our problem is not that we don't have students, it's that we don't have facilities," he said, noting that the district has spent its facility money over the years in places such as Maumelle, Sherwood and Jacksonville. Those are all cities that are exploring to one degree or another the possibility of separating from the school district.

Education notebook (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

Half-day to close LR's school year

Thursday is the last day of class for students in the Little Rock School District.

It will only be a half-day of school to make up for part of a day missed earlier in the school year because of inclement weather.

Elementary schools will dismiss at 11:30 a.m. Thursday. Middle and high schools will dismiss at 12:45 p.m.

The last day of class was Friday for students in the North Little Rock and Pulaski County Special school districts.

Truant, homeless LR data released

The end of the school year routinely results in a number of reports on a wide range of subjects.

One such short report recently sent to the Little Rock School Board notes that the district's Homeless Education Program had identified a total of 666 homeless students as of May 1. That figure included 103 students living in shelters, 468 "doubled-up" with another family, 27 unaccompanied children and youth, and 68 living in a hotel or motel.

Another recent report to the School Board showed that 1,106 students were referred this school year to the Little Rock city attorney's office for prosecution on allegations of truancy violations - 536 referrals during the first semester and 570 as of early May for the spring semester.

That total is up slightly from the 1,028 referrals made in the 2011-12 school year and up significantly from the 359 referrals in the 2010-11 school year. The increase was attributed to changes in state law and more aggressive measures by the district to improve student attendance.

LR district to host 2 recruiting fairs

The Little Rock School District in the coming weeks will host two recruiting fairs - one for new teachers and one for businesses owned by minority-group members and/ or women.

The teacher job fair will be Saturday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Arkansas State Fairgrounds. Principals will be on hand to interview candidates for jobs. All participants must register online prior to the event. More information is available on the district's website, lrzd.org or by calling 447-1101.

The district's first Minority & Women Business Enterprise Summit will be June 26 from 8 a.m. to noon at the district's Technology Center, 7701 Scott Hamilton. The free event is designed to provide

minority-group and women-owned businesses with information on how to conduct business with the state's largest school district.

The School Board approved a policy in September calling for the district to attempt to spend 30 percent of its purchasing funds with businesses owned by members of minority groups and 30 percent with companies owned by women.

Currently, less than 2 percent of the district's purchasing funds go to such businesses. The district made total purchases ranging from \$3.3 million to \$8.3 million a month in recent months.

The policy uses Arkansas' definition of a minority-group owned business as one in which at least 51 percent of the company is owned by a black, Hispanic, American Indian or Asian-Pacific Islander.

Nagel, 66, to retire as union's director

Rich Nagel, the executive director of the Arkansas Education Association, the state's largest teachers union, is retiring effective June 10.

He is known in education circles for his expansive knowledge of public school finance and state government operations, as well as skill in teacher contract negotiations.

Donna Morey, president of the association, called him analytical, reflective and circumspect.

Now 66, Nagel has been working in education for 44 years, 38 of them in Arkansas. He has been in his job since 2000. Previously, he held a variety of jobs with the association, including associate executive director and school finance and research consultant.

He also is a former executive director of the Little Rock Classroom Teachers Association, since renamed the Little Rock Education Association.

He is a native of Illinois and began his career in education as a teacher in that state.

A search for Nagel's successor is under way.